



## **Lynn Coleman**

Oral History Transcription

August 17, 2001 [Side A]

Interviewed by:	Amy Selner and Jennifer Fanning
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Transcribed by:	Zoë Morgan, Student Worker, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	<p>Lynn Coleman discusses growing up on the west side of South Bend in the LaSalle Park area, in the neighborhood known as “The Lake” or, “The Dump.” Mr. Coleman recounts some of the “differences” in the South Bend and Mishawaka communities and how race may have been a factor. He talks about the race riots of the 1960’s and how he experienced them as a student at Washington High School. He goes on to detail the “breaks” or “blessings” that changed the direction of his life and led him to his career with the police department, his work with juveniles and his current position with the mayor’s office. Lynn Coleman credits the people that helped him along the way and discusses the importance of giving back, teaching and setting an example, not only for black youths, but for the community-at-large.</p>

0:00:00 [Amy Selner] Did you get the invitation for our board update?

[Lynn Coleman] Mmhmm.

[AS] Good job.

[LC] Yep. September the 14<sup>th</sup>.

[AS] It's gonna be a good lunch too, man.

[LC] Yeah, I'll be there.

0:28:00 [AS] Anyway, since you know you're probably quite familiar with our program, since you were there in its initial birth that we wanted to do interviews with prominent and not so prominent black citizens throughout our community to see what they remember about the civil rights time and to see what South Bend was like. That was one of the main things we got from the trip when we went down South. We came back saying, "What was going on here? Did South Bend care? How did the South Bend Tribune portray it? What did our citizens do and how did we handle segregation? How segregated were we up in the North?"

So now we're trying to find out. In the process we've found out how little anybody's ever recorded of any of the African American history in our community. So this is kind of a dual prong of trying to start recording some of those great moments in some of those places and times and the people. So Jen's gonna start out with a couple of questions so I don't dominate, cause all of us Selners, you know us, we're talkers.

[Jennifer Fanning] Well I'm just wondering if you could start off with telling us a little bit about yourself and your family and what you've done.

0:01:53 [LC] Well obviously you know my name, and for the tape I'll just say it, Lynn Coleman. This is home for me. I was born and raised in this community, I lived here all my life. I grew up on the lake. We know it as LaSalle Park now, we knew it then as "the Lake", "Beck's Lake", "the Dump", "the Swamp", you know, depending on who you talked to, when you talked to them. All those names were attached to that community. Went to school at Harrison. When I went to school it was K through 8. LaPiere Center and went to Washington High School, and graduated from high school in '72. Immediately after high school, about two weeks later, three weeks later, I got hired at A&M General, Kaiser Jeep. I worked there for about three years, I was on payroll for about three years. I only worked for a little over a year and a half. That year and a half, I spent several weeks on layoff, but we made army trucks and mail trucks for the most part, that's what I did there.

0:03:11 [LC] In '74, I messed up my back, severely injured my back, some how, and I still don't know how, and had major back surgery. Injured my back in '73, had back surgery in '74, was on disability for a couple of years, and after I came out of that, I joined the police department. I joined the police department, I got hired in '77, went to rookie school, got sworn in, in '78. I had worked for the police department for 22 years, retired from the police department and last year, was given this position on the mayor's staff, as one of his assistants, and that's what I do.

[JF] Great. Could you tell us a little bit more about your neighborhood, where you grew up, what it was like growing up in the area called "the Lake", that you were...?

0:04:16 [LC] I don't know. Life is in stages, so you remember stuff, probably in stages. As a kid, and it was fun. We were poor, I didn't realize it because everybody was. I lived in the 200 block of Kenmore Street. So when I was a kid, Kenmore Street, in the area that I lived in, the back of Kenmore Street was the start of a dump, a city dump. So where LaSalle Park is right now, all that was grown-up, it was a dump, it wasn't cleaned off, it was not a park. That didn't happen until the late sixties, they started cleaning that up and that kind of thing. So that's where we played at and that was our life.

0:05:17 We went to, obviously, the Harrison School. We walked, in that community, in that neighborhood, I don't know how much, how often you've been out there, how much you know about it. But, in that neighborhood, this is Western Avenue, to the south, and this is Linden Road to the north, okay. Harrison School set here, Kentucky Street, Falcon Street is somewhere closer there. Kenmore Street was here, we'd walk Kenmore Street, some variances to that. Crosswalk and to the school, we didn't go south of the school, we didn't have any reason to, okay. Black folks typically lived between Meade Street to the east, and then if you go this way, your tracks are here. Bendix Corporation is up here and Chicago Street is here, okay. Black folks in that area, where I grew up at, we lived between Chicago Street and Meade Street, Western Avenue to Linden, okay. That was, the lake was here. This is Washington Street right here, the lake was there, this was dump area and that's where you lived at. So that was alright there. Obviously...

[AS] The south side of Western was still white?

0:06:54 [LC] Yeah, the south side of Western was predominately black, I mean was predominately white. The west side of Chicago Street, from Sheridan, everything west was predominately white. On the north side of Linden Road was the Bendix Corporation, the tracks. You didn't go over there

unless you were going to the swimming pool, over to Kennedy pool. West of us, Olive Street, was sort of business district heading toward downtown and we didn't do a whole lot down in there. The A&P set up in there. So a lot of people went to the A&P and, you know, shopped and done groceries and...

[AS] Did you have businesses in that area? That were black businesses, black owned businesses or catered to blacks?

[LC] For the most part, no. There was Perry's Pharmacy, had a little drug store right here. On the corner of... between...

[AS] Right, like where Herb's Towing was? Is that Perry's?

0:08:09 [LC] No, no, no. It was on Washington Street and Falcon. Washington and Falcon. Perry's Drug Store was in there and then when he moved out, another guy ran just the store, a penny store, not a drug store. There was a barbershop right next door. The little church, right there at the corner of Kenmore and Washington sold snow cones and stuff like that. If you went up on Western, there was A&J Food Market, and couple other little food stores up there. We would go to there. Down by where Martin's is now, at some point there was a Lou Ann's down there. Where the U-Haul store is on Western Avenue, there was a grocery store there, a couple other small stores in there. But, right inside of this area, there was probably no businesses or anything like that. You had to go to Western Avenue for that. Alford's Funeral Home started over here on the corner of Jefferson and Illinois Street, that's where he started...

[AS] Oh, Jefferson and Illinois?

0:09:21 [LC] Yeah, where it first started at, down in there. But, other than that, that was about it, the rest of it was pretty much residential. There was a lady that lived on Illinois and Washington Street that sold ice cream out of her house, you know, and that kind of thing. But, as far as a real business, no.

[AS] When, and this is a question that we've been trying to ask kids too, when did you realize, or when was the first time that you can remember, that there was issues, with race? That there's things you couldn't do, or that you questioned, that you felt, you know, like discriminated against?

[LC] Mm...I don't know. I really don't.

[AS] It's a difficult question I know, but it's an interesting one.

0:10:24 [LC] Yeah, and I guess if you search hard enough, you can come up with something close. My parents were from the South. Both my parents were

from Mississippi. One was from a little place called Louisville, Mississippi, my father was. My mother was from a little place called Kosciusko, Mississippi. So as kids, every now and then, we would go back to Mississippi to visit. I can remember that we always traveled late at night. The first part of the trip would be late at night. They would always put a big jar, in the car, for us to use the restroom with, so that they didn't have to stop. They would always pack the car with food so that we would always have food in the car, and didn't have to stop, okay. I can remember once going down, and they stopped at a service station to get gas. We got out of the car and there was a sign there saying "no coloreds allowed", and this was mid-sixties. So you know that, and you know, you see that kind of stuff probably locally.

0:11:47 I was a young kid, but I can remember when President Kennedy got killed, and I can remember they announced it in school. That day when we came home, my mother was at home, and some of the neighbors were over at our house and they were setting there crying. So I can remember that. I remember when Martin Luther King got killed in '68, and obviously, I was in eighth grade then. I remember that real well and I can remember the noise and stuff, the hell people raised about that in '68. The community, the black community, had a rally the day after he got killed and the NAACP organized it. The black community walked from different sections of the community and everybody converged up, downtown at the courthouse. After the speeches and stuff like that, there was some looting and that kind of thing. I can remember that.

0:12:55 I can remember the night that Melvin Phillips got his leg shot off, out on Western Avenue, down by the LaSalle Fillmore neighborhood center. The Lake in the mid-sixties went through a redevelopment issue, most of the people out there had small homes, you know, most of them were two bedroom homes, no basements, no garages or anything like that. In the sixties most of those houses had begin to show their wear and redevelopment came through. That's when they cleaned up the park, started cleaning up the park. There was some old military looking block, concrete block apartments, public housing in that area. Those got tore down. They started cleaning up and that kind of thing. The older people in that community had begin to question the city's involvement, concern about their community, you know, asked them for paved streets and lights and you know a park and all those kind of things. So I can remember back then when there was issues with blacks and whites and that kind of thing. Can always remember, as a young kid we were always told, you know, the difference between Mishawaka and South Bend, Mishawaka being, you know, a white community, and blacks folks weren't, you know, welcomed or allowed over there.

[AS] Yeah, I can still remember that.

0:14:45 [LC] You certainly didn't want to get caught in Mishawaka after dark and so you remember that as a kid. So probably, twelve years old, okay, probably '66, something like that, you really start knowing the difference, you know, and realizing that there was a difference between who we were and the other people, you know, in the community. I can remember the riots of '67, '68. We had family in Chicago and we were over in Chicago and they actually had Army tanks patrolling the streets in Chicago, in certain places. We just thought that was so weird and wild, and the riots and the fights and stuff like that. While we were over there, you heard talk about the Blackstone Rangers and that kind of thing. I never will forget that, it was real strange. Coming home that night, we got into town, and it was going on here in South Bend. So, certainly, you know, remember, you know, that kind of stuff.

[AS] What do you— because you graduated from Washington and I mean that— from, I was I think eight or nine at the time, but the riots that happened out there at the school.

0:16:18 [LC] Nineteen— the first year that I remember was 1968, '69, and unfortunately, I went to Riley, Washington High School in 1968 in September, my freshman year, and graduated in May of '72. Every year, every year at Washington High School we had some kind of race riot, every year. Every year. I, I didn't remember a race riot at school, and maybe because I just wasn't conscious of it, but I, you know, didn't have any remembrance of it until the fall of '68, at Washington High School. After that we had a least one every year, every year.

[AS] I guess another interesting aspect of just knowing a little bit more about you as a person and following your career, you've always been on the side of the right. You know, you've been a police officer— Well, you know, a police officer for a long time so, you know, you upheld law and order. You've had a very nice police career, no blemishes, no [inaudible]. You've got a great track record. One of the better policemen that I've ever met.

[LC] Thank you, thank you.

0:17:37 [AS] Then you've gone into community service, but you've always been, seemed to be active in the community. Where did that, that community involvement, come from?

[LC] Well...

[AS] I'm not going to ask you the easy ones.

[LC] It's not tough, and I just have to be careful. I sort of get emotional about stuff like this, and the way you just recanted Lynn's life...

[AS] It's been an incredible experience.

[LC] It has been, and I'm extremely grateful.

[AS] You're making me...I'm tearing up.

0:18:21 [LC] God's been good to me and given me, you know, found favor in me and you know, I'm all right, but it didn't start there. That was after the change in Lynn's life. I was kicked out of high school in '72, for being involved in the race riots. My dad was, God bless him, love him to death, a bootlegger. Had liquor in our house all— I started drinking probably when I was twelve years old, sixth grade. Smoked my first joint when I was in the eighth grade, in '67. Fought, cheated, stole, lied. I done everything everybody else did. Well not everybody, but a lot of the people did. Wasn't the smartest kid in school, certainly not the best behaved and that kind of thing, and I got a break. My break was probably, not knowing it then, but as I look back on it now, it was probably more spiritual than anything, and I adhere to it. Unfortunately, a lot of times, when you get breaks and, or blessings, people call them breaks, I call them blessings, when we get them, a) we don't recognize them as being such, and b) we certainly don't adhere to, to them, an idea.

0:20:02 So that was part of my conversion or my turnaround. When that happened for me, I always knew that I wanted to work with kids, in some way or another and I wanted to help somebody. I certainly didn't want to be a policeman; it was not something I wanted to do. As a young kid, I didn't know any policemen. I had seen them, but I didn't know them. Then from '68 to '72, my experience with police were not positive, okay. Being black, from "the Lake," Washington High School, race riots and all that stuff, we didn't have positive experiences with policemen. Policemen to us, were authoritative figured white men, that could tell you what to do, when to do, and how to do, and if you didn't adhere to that, they'd beat your butt, okay. Policemen were, the folks that you seen on TV, that was putting dogs on black people. Or, you know, shooting black people that you would see in other places of the country. So being a policeman was never something that I had conceived of doing and, or being. Policemen drove the trucks that rolled down Washington Street when I was a kid and tear-gassed whole corners where we stood...

[AS] To get you off the streets.

- 0:21:41 [LC] To keep us off the streets. Policemen were responsible for the situation that happened on Western Avenue the night that Melvin Phillips got shot. A lot of people got hurt or went to jail. So being a policeman wasn't something I wanted to do, and plus, being that was a sign and, or symbol and, in the black community anyway, as being as sell-out, a turncoat, a Uncle Tom and all those kind of things, and certainly didn't want to be identified with being that. After I worked for A&M General, when my back went out, I had an opportunity to go back to school, out at IU. Again, wasn't a smart kid, but you know, I didn't want to work in the factory and you know it was a means to an ends. When I went to school out there, it was my hopes of being a probation officer. Some things happened. After I got out of high school, I begin to do some community stuff out at LaSalle Park, like volunteering, working at the center and stuff, and started hanging around with some positive people. I knew then that I wanted to do something different in my life, and I started working toward that. Well, that was the break I got.
- 0:23:08 In the summer of '76, I was working a summer job for the city, for the summer youth employment program, and had an opportunity to meet and work closely with a lot of policemen. At the end of that, I wanted to work security at one of the schools during the day, so I could continue to go to school at IU at night, to try to be a juvenile probation officer and they didn't have any jobs over there. Was working with Mr. Perkins who worked for the school system at the time, and he asked me if I'd be interested in working security for the South Bend Housing Authority. I told him no at first, because it was police stuff, you know, uniformed guard, that kind of thing.
- [AS] With the badge and back in the neighborhood too.
- 0:23:59 [LC] And didn't know if I wanted to do that, but I needed a job, and he encouraged me to do it, so I applied and they hired me. I enjoyed it and it wasn't at all what I thought it was going to be. It gave me a opportunity to help some people and that's what I wanted to do. That was in '76, I'd done it for a year, I liked it, and had an opportunity to interact a lot with policemen and realize that that was a job and a place that I could be at, earn a living, a respectable job, someplace I could retire from, and most importantly a place that I could help people. So I applied for the job and got hired. Again, another blessing or a break, however you label that.
- 0:24:54 My intentions when I joined the police department, was to work ten years, to finish getting my degree and upon receiving my degree, approach the chief of police, at that time, whoever it would have been and tell them I wanted to be in the juvenile division. As things evolved, when I got ten years on, I was in charge of, what we knew as our juvenile division, was



doing real well in the police department, involved in the community. The only thing I hadn't accomplished was receiving my degree. So things just evolved from there and here I am. I don't have any regrets. I'm not proud of every thing I've done, but I don't have any regrets. God's been good to me, this community has been good to me. There's a lot of people in this community that's helped me and supported me and this will always be home for me. So now, it's my obligation and responsibility to give back to those that gave me. Even if those are gone, those who they represent, it's my responsibility to help them, and that's across the board. That's not only black community, white community, Hispanic community, poor community, rich community, the community at-large. I owe a lot.

0:26:37 One of the problems that I think we have, and you mentioned it earlier, that there's not a lot recorded about that area, that era in time. We've never dealt with, this society, we've never dealt with, not only what happened in South Bend, but across this country. About the divide between blacks and whites, and poor, and you know, wealthy and you know. We've never dealt with that. It was easier not to talk about it. That, "Oh, it'll go away", and you know, "Everybody's not like that", and that kind of thing. We've never truly dealt with those issues, so they're still out there, they still linger, and they will be. They will be until we take a concerted effort, across the board, in this country, to take that and put it on the top of the agenda in this country and really spend a lot of time talking about, and trying to resolve those issues. So for Lynn Coleman, having lived through all that, and you go to the movies and you're told to sit in the balcony, you know, and that kind of thing. Walk down the streets and not have sidewalks, all those kind of things. You remember that stuff.

[phone rings]

[LC] Yes?

0:28:14 [Lynn talks to someone on the phone]

0:28:27 [AS] Because you are, you are how they come wrapped, I mean that's it. You are you, no matter, you know, every morning you get up and you're the same way every day. You don't change because you walk into the mayor's office, you don't change...

[LC] Yes, I'm Lynn Coleman and every time you see me, you know. I've had people that tell me, "Well Lynn, I seen you the other day and—". "Why didn't you speak?" "Well you were standing there with the mayor, and you were standing there with this person and that—". Look, okay, and I tell kids all the time, "I don't care where you see me at, who you see me with, what you see me doing. If you see me, speak to me. If you want to come

up to me and I'm with anybody, there's a way to do it, okay. But, come up to me, speak to me, you know I'm going to acknowledge you, I'm going to speak to you, and you know, and I'm tied up and I can't, I'm going to say: Look it's good to see you, you know". Hand shakes or hugs, whatever we do. "I'll talk to you later". That kind of thing.

0:29:20 But I've never wanted people to think, that Lynn Coleman was all of that and not touchable. I'm not. My phone number is still in the book, my address is not, but my phone number is. You know anybody that calls me, whether they call me here or at home, you know, I'll call them back, you know. I am not—all I am, and sometimes, God's truth, I sit here and I look out of this window, and if you realize it or not, sitting out of this window, I'm looking west. I can almost imagine my house from right here. That's Western Avenue right there, this is Jefferson Street, the next block is Washington Street. So if you take Washington Street and go straight west, that building, long building right there is Marycrest.

[AS] Oh, ok Singer, right? The old Singer?

0:30:17 [LC] Yeah, that's the Marycrest building, ok. If you look right between those woods right there, just about where I live at. Sometimes I sit here in a quiet moment, and I'll look around this office, I'll look out of that window, and that's where I'm from. "Lord, how did I get here?" I'm no better than nobody else. I'm certainly not any worse than anybody else, but I'm no better than anybody else, okay. He found favor in me, this, and sometimes it's hard for me to even believe that I'm Lynn Coleman, yeah. But, I ain't all of that. All I am is a young black guy that got a break, okay. I got the break, I took advantage of it, I recognized it, took advantage of it and here I am. I am one day away from probably being a dope head, a drug addict, an alcoholic, you know, homeless, unemployed. One day away, okay. I could have easily tipped one way or the other, okay. Instead of doing twenty years on the police department, I could have easily done twenty years in prison. I got a break.

[AS] Well, you said that you had been in the riots, you got kicked out of school because of the riots. Obviously, I could imagine which side you were on, but, you obviously had anger and frustration at what was going on with the system. That's what a lot of kids are doing today. They have that same anger. How did you deal? If you had any advice to give, how do you work through that anger? I mean, I personally, I was the black sheep in my family. I was the one that nobody ever talked about because I did basically what you did: I lived, went out on the nutsy, coo-coo side.

0:32:11 [LC] Well, I tell young people now, you can always do more from the inside out, then you can from the outside in. So it's important for us to try

to make sure that we put ourselves in a position, to get on the inside, okay. If I'm mad at you, and I'm standing outside your window yelling and screaming, "Dah, dah, dah", all day long, you won't hear me. "Look at that fool outside there". But, if you let me in, I can at least sit down and talk to you and make you understand where I'm coming from, understand what's going on with you and that kind of thing. So you can do more from in the inside out, than you can from the outside in. So we have to get involved so that we can get on the inside.

0:32:54      What happened with me in my senior year in high school... In the following year, we had fights, okay, at the school. We had, um, we had... Again, when we went to Washington High School, after you crossed Sheridan Street and walked west to the school, all that was predominately white neighborhood. Once you got [on] the south side of Western Avenue, coming north to the school, all of that was predominately white, okay. So we had black kids that would come to school there, and on their way to school, they would be riding down the street and they would get called out other names and bad names. The girls would get caught one or two at a time, and they would get beat up or you know threatened. Sexual, you know, comments made to them and that kind of stuff.

We had fights in October, at the school that year, in October of '71 or something like that. We got our best to keep it from happening, you know, keep people from not fighting and that kind of thing. Well in May, late April, early May, spring of the year, it started all over again, you know. The name calling, the threats. They'd catch them walking down the street, catch one or two guys, and so, you know, that's enough of this. We're done, okay. The school wasn't hearing it, you know, the city wasn't hearing it. That's enough of this.

So, the guys, you know, we're done. We're going to retaliate, and that's what happened. I was a senior, okay, I was there. One of the teachers said that they'd seen me fighting, okay. I got kicked out of school, me and five other guys.

[AS] Were you?

[LC] Yeah, mmhmm..

0:34:38      [AS] Well, and I guess—how did, not being there, and of course reporting coverage always lacks a lot of, you know the real stuff. What happened? Why? How did it start? I mean just two people fighting and then it escalated?

[LC] No. The last time, they actually went to the school, walked in the building and decided that everybody that they seen, that didn't look like them, okay. Males, they was going to get, and they did, or we did. Mmhmm.

[AS] So how many, how many was kicked out? How many were kicked out?

[LC] Oh, I don't remember. I can remember five people that was with me, they got kicked out of school. I think, for sure, I know it was me, Mike Mays...

[AS] Mike Mays?

[LC] Larry Jones, mmhmm. Mike Mays works for UPS or one of those places now. James Lane who is a minister now, up on the East coast in... Where is he at...? I'll think of it later. Larry Jones, Al Braylock—

[AS] Braylock?

[LC] Al Braylock. Al Braylock was a hell of an athlete. He had gotten a scholarship to play football up in Michigan. I mean, play football and basketball up in Michigan. He got involved. He got kicked out of school, okay.

[AS] This was like a month before you graduated?

0:36:04 [LC] A month before, May 6<sup>th</sup>. It happened May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1972, okay. We were all kicked out of school. Now, not only did we get kicked out of school, but word was on the street that we were going to get arrested, by the police, for inciting a riot, okay. Well we didn't go home and we all stayed on the street or with buddies, or whatever, you know, during that time. Braylock, as we all drank and that kind of thing, Braylock got drunk and went home and went to sleep. The next morning, the police came to his house about 7:30, 8:00, to serve a warrant on him and Braylock went to jail. When Braylock went to jail, he lost his scholarships, okay. He never went to college. Right now, to this day, Braylock is struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. Never held down, you know, a job for any length of time, or anything like that.

[AS] So he didn't catch that break...

[LC] No.

[AS] If he just wouldn't have gone home...

[LC] No, no.

[AS] Because you were never arrested, because you couldn't have become a police officer if you were, right?

0:37:07 [LC] No, I didn't get arrested. The police came to my house looking for me, and I wasn't at home, okay. In fact, the night before they came to my house, me and some other people slept in the park, that night to keep from going home. We just made sure that we wasn't around, and after a while it passed. What happened was that, we had to go to a hearing, at the school, because they were actually expelling us, not suspending us. So we went to the hearing. In the hearing, they told us that we couldn't go back to school, that we were done. But, what they told us that we could do, was that we could go back and take our finals, okay. James Lane was a senior, I was a senior, Braylock was a senior, Mike Mays was a senior, Larry Jones was a senior, Dean Stokes was a sophomore and there was some more, I mean a junior. There was some more, and I can't remember everybody now. None of the white guys got kicked out of school, as I can remember.

0:38:13 Anyway, I got kicked out, they let me go back to take my final. Keep in mind, I had not been a good student, okay. You know, I drank, you know, I skipped a lot. When I was there, I wasn't there, because, you know I wasn't in the school mode, okay. So, I didn't do real well in high school. So my senior year, I was taking two underclass classes to graduate, okay. I was struggling trying to graduate, but I had made up my mind the year before that I wanted to graduate with my class. So I went to summer school the summer before and took by senior history class, and I knew that I was going to have to take my junior history class over again, because I had flunked it. I was going to have to take my sophomore biology class again, because I had flunked that. Well my senior, I mean my junior, my junior history class I was doing well in, okay. My biology class, I was not doing well in, okay. I didn't like the teacher, I didn't like biology, you know, wasn't the smartest cookie in the place anyway, and so I really struggled with that. So when we went to take our finals, I passed all my finals, but my biology final. I flunked it. If I don't pass biology, I can't graduate, okay.

0:39:43 Bob Meehan, who was administrator of the school at the time, just retired from Elkhart a couple years ago, called me at home and said, "Lynn, we've got a problem." "What's the matter?" I'm still mad and hostile and that kind of thing. Liked Bob Meehan, loved him, okay, and still do to this day. But, you know, I'm upset and that kind of thing. I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "You didn't pass your biology final." So we had already said that if anybody that had gotten kicked out in that bunch didn't graduate, we were going to cause a problem at graduation, okay.

[AS] Uh, huh.

0:40:24 [LC] So, I wasn't going to graduate. He said, "Now, I'll talk to Mr. Horowitz," who was my biology teacher, "and ask him to give you an opportunity to take the final again." Okay. "He has agreed to do that. If you pass the final, you'll graduate. If you don't, you're going to have to come back to summer school." I had already decided, I wasn't going to go back to summer school, I wasn't going back to school any more, I was done. If I didn't do it then, I was done. "Do you want to take the final again?" "Yeah, I'll do it, okay". "Come up here tomorrow, I'll get you some material so that you can study, okay, and the next day you come and take the test." That's what I did. The same test that I had flunked miserably before, I passed.

0:41:09 The night before I went and took the test, I'll never forget it as long as I live. I was sitting in the living room with my mother, and I don't know why no one else was around, okay, because at the time my mother and father were still together, they hadn't divorced yet, or hadn't separated yet. My oldest sister was not living with us now, she had moved out. My oldest brother lived there, my oldest two brothers lived there, and I had a brother and sister younger than me. Our house was always full of people. Nobody was there but me and my mother for some reason. We were sitting in the living room and one of the evangelistic preachers was on TV, Billy Graham I think it was. He was doing his deal, and mama was sitting there watching it, and I'm there sitting on the floor and that kind of thing. He said, "Pray with me." Without word, my mother and I joined hands, okay, never said a word, okay. I can remember him saying, "Amen", and we released hands. Never talked about that at all. The next day I went to school, I took that test and I passed it, and to this day if you ask me something about biology, I can't tell you a word about it. But, they told me I passed that test. I graduated from high school that Wednesday night with the rest of my class. That was probably for me, one of my known, listed breaks, okay. That people would call a break, I call a blessing.

0:42:47 Three weeks later, my mother told me that I couldn't live with her, if I wasn't working or in school. She woke me up at 6:00 in the morning, to go job hunting, because neither one of us was working. She was laid off from her work. We went out to Kaiser Jeep, A&M General, and we were there at 7:00 in the morning, and we applied for a job. I didn't want to be there, but I knew I had to go, okay. So I went and I had done what I was supposed to do. After I applied, I went back out in the car and laid down and went to sleep. My mother was still in there doing her deal. She came back out there and woke me up and she said, "Let's go." I said, "Where we going?" She said, "We going to get a job." I said, "Mom, I've already applied, I'm done". She said, "No, we're going to get a job. We've got an

interview.” Before we left their campus that day, we were both employed, at A&M General, okay. That was it, we got a job. I think that was like on a Wednesday or Thursday. I had to go and take my physical that Friday, and I started work that next Monday.

0:43:57 [AS] Now how often does that happen, the first place that you go to, and especially a good paying place?

[LC] I’m telling you.

[AS] Yeah, something was working for you.

[LC] That was my second...

[AS] Oh, yeah.

[LC] Break or blessing that I knew of. Didn’t realize it then, do now.

[AS] How many blacks were employed at A&M General? I mean was it...

[LC] In the factory? Quite a few.

[AS] So we were being diverse in the factory work place then?

0:44:25 [LC] But, you know, if you knew somebody, you know, you could probably get in, you know. I don’t, to this day, I don’t know how it happened, I just know that we worked there. Three, five, seven...my mother’s personnel number was three, five, seven, six, eight, and mine was three, five, seven... No. Three, five...mama’s was three, five, seven, six, eight—Mama’s was six, eight and mine was seven, two. So there was four between us, you know, and that was just by the way we walked in the door. I started work the next Monday, okay. I worked there and I worked a while and got laid off, worked a while and got laid off, or whatever. In the fall of ’73, I developed this back stuff, okay. My back went out and that kind of thing, and again I was on disability for three years.

0:45:20 Well because of that, I couldn’t work and that kind of thing. I consider that my next major break or blessing because it caused me to actually have to stop, to slow down and reflect on life, what it was, you know, what I was doing, where I was going, and after I got well, I was up and running then, and I have been running ever since. I didn’t like the disability stuff, waiting on a check every month, you know, waiting on somebody to take care of me and all that kind of stuff. You know, I wanted to be inde...and in that time, I had learned I was better than what I had been portrayed, and I wanted to do some different things. I graduated the summer of ’72. Later that summer, I actually stopped drinking. I stopped hanging on the streets,

and I got more involved in church and doing some things, and that was my major turn around.

[AS] What church do you belong to?

0:46:21 [LC] Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. It's right on the corner of Falcon...

[AS] Seabe.

[LC] Seabe Gavin'. I was born and raised in that church, and the church has taken a major change in the last ten years. Our old pastor died, Dave Davis, who was a pioneer in the LaSalle Park area.

[Audio ends]